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ABSTRACT

This paper takes the position that philosophy is a critical avenue with which to approach a study of schooling, and that study of philosophy and philosophy of education will provide a framework needed for inquiry into schooling that is foundational, diverse, and critical. Processes of philosophical inquiry include the following: (1) conceptual analysis; (2) situating educational issues within philosophical traditions; (3) the examination of epistemological and axiomatic assumptions, as well as criticisms; and (4) critical thinking and analysis of existing literature and theory. The basic questions of philosophy provide a conceptual framework that gives coherence to the study of philosophy and identify the major concerns of education, providing the possibility for coherence in educational practice. Another framework to be used in examining the relationship between philosophy, research, and education would be an examination of the differing approaches to the study of philosophy (descriptive, normative, and analytic). The way in which philosophy is carried out--philosophical inquiry, the problem-posing, the questioning, the search for clarification, the quest for seeing things relationally--provides multiple ways of inquiring into the world of social and educational realities. (Contains 29 references.) (AEF)

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**Title:**

# What We Talk About When We Talk About Philosophy And Educational Research*

***(with apologies to Raymond Carver)**

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We do philosophy (theorize) when, for whatever reason, we are aroused to wonder about how events and experiences are interpreted and should be interpreted. We philosophize when we can no longer tolerate the splits and fragmentations in our pictures of the world, when we desire some kind of wholeness and integration, some coherence which is our own (Greene, 1974, pp.10-11). This is private work. This happens on a personal level as we work through the dailiness of everyday life. It becomes public when we struggle with the realities of classroom life.

As educators, we are concerned with philosophical issues and questions in our daily work within classrooms. As we debate curricular issues, as we decide educational policy, as we work with students and their "behavior", as we "test" students' "knowledge", etc., we are concerned with philosophy. However, the underlying ideas behind our practice may go un-noticed, may be unconscious, may be unquestioned. The importance of philosophical inquiry in education is exactly at this point: philosophical inquiry can illuminate, inform, call into question, etc., the taken for granted notions that we have. Philosophical inquiry and analysis can help conceptual clarification, as well as inform our praxis, and vice versa.

In this paper/presentation, I will take the position that philosophy is a critical way to studying schooling. Hence, the study of philosophy/philosophy of education will provide a framework needed for inquiry into schooling that is foundational (theoretical), diverse, and critical. This will suggest the need for taking a theoretical stance with regard to our work.[1]

Taking a theoretical stance with regard to our work suggests dealing with a broad analysis of education, i.e., concern with "the big picture". The big picture of education is complicated. At the same time, educators are confronted with a sense of urgency to solve educational problems. Philosophy is too time consuming. As Eisner (1991) states, "Philosophy is nagging. It conjoles students into asking questions about basic assumptions, it generates doubts and uncertainties, and, it is said, it keeps people from getting their work done" (pp.4-5). Philosophizing about the issues does take time, and it is messy. And this does seem to take us away from our work.

## PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR INQUIRY

Philosophical inquiry provides ways for educators to "inquire into their work", to question their theory and practice. Processes of philosophical inquiry include the following: (1) conceptual analysis; (2) situating educational issues within philosophical traditions; (3) the examination of epistemological and axiological assumptions, criticisms, and (4) critical thinking and analysis of existing literature and theory. These processes are ways of doing philosophy.[2]

I believe philosophy is the foundation (theory) of educational research. This can be seen by posing the basic questions of philosophy: What is the nature of reality? What is the nature of knowledge? What is of value? These questions provide a conceptual framework that gives coherence to the study of philosophy. These questions also identify the major concerns of education and provide the possibility for a coherence in educational practice. By coherence I mean they provide educators with a possible framework for posing questions from multiple perspectives that allow us to reflect on our work. For example, they allow us to pose multiple questions regarding the nature of curricula. They allow us to examine whose knowledge we are promoting, and even prior to that, what knowledge is of most worth. Questions of value ask us why we choose this particular knowledge, and leave all of the rest out, etc. Engaging in this questioning is philosophical inquiry, is doing philosophy.

Another framework I can use in looking at the relationship between philosophy, research and education, would be an examination of the differing approaches to the study of philosophy. Wingo (1974) states that we can approach the study of philosophy in three different ways (these ways may also be looked at as the main functions of philosophy): the descriptive, the normative, and the analytic (pp.15-16).

To engage in descriptive philosophical inquiry, a student would be involved in the study of the history of philosophy. S/he would be studying "what is (and has been) the field of philosophy. Working comprehensively, he is trying to picture the general development of philosophical thought" (p.15). This is more than studying "intellectual history". As Wingo points out, it is possible to study about what philosophers have said, and at the same time be doing philosophy in that we are "analyzing and clarifying concepts and the language in which ideas are expressed" (p.15). This is the area identified earlier as situating educational issues within a philosophical tradition. For example, educational issues looked at from the viewpoint of different philosophies, and what writers within those philosophical traditions said about the issues, how they would go about making sense of those issues, establish a world-view (metaphysics/ontology), a way of knowing (epistemology), and a way to make decisions regarding action (axiology). Philosophy of education textbooks would be good examples of the descriptive perspective (cf. Wingo, 1974; Gutek, 1988; Ozmon and Craver, 1995).

To engage in normative philosophical inquiry a student would be involved with values (axiology). Interests could focus on ethics or aesthetics. He will be involved with advocating some ends or objectives (values) that he believes to be desirable and with explaining the reasons for their desirability. He may also be involved in suggesting means for advocating these values. His main concern is not what is, but what ought to be. (p.15) Normative philosophical inquiry explores and critiques philosophical positions, as well as makes decisions as the "rightness and wrongness" of those positions (see Webb, et al, 1992). The normative perspective requires an examination of epistemological and axiological assumptions, as well as critical thinking and analysis of existing literature and theory as part of inquiry (cf. Kaufmann, 1974; Dewey, 1904 [1964]).

To engage in analytic philosophical inquiry is to engage in the "analysis of language, concepts, theories, and so on" (Wingo, 1974, p.15). This is the practice that analytic philosophers consider "doing philosophy". According to Webb, et al. (1992), analytic philosophy has as its goal to improve our understanding of education by clarifying our educational concepts, beliefs, arguments, assumptions. For example, an analytic philosophy of education would attempt to understand such questions as: What is experience? What is understanding? What is readiness? (pp.174-5) The analytic perspective has to do with conceptual analysis (cf., Tom, 1984; Wilson, 1963).

This framework of the "functions" of philosophy suggests the foundations position mentioned earlier. Each of these three functions can provide multiple possibilities for educational research and, more specifically, philosophical inquiry. The descriptive, normative and analytic forms of philosophical inquiry suggest indepth study of the philosophy of education. Looking at different philosophical traditions with regards to metaphysics/ontology, epistemology and axiology requires study in philosophy. Movements in education, e.g., reconstructionism, perrenialism, essentialism, Marxism and education, and more recent movements rooted in critical theory, postmodern analyses, renewed emphasis on democratic schooling and forms of emancipatory praxis, etc., represent major areas of study for researchers. These areas of study have their own world-views and concerns. Writers within these positions offer differing conceptual frameworks, differing questions posed, and hence challenges to status quo practice. And they all engage the student in philosophical inquiry.

The study of the philosophy of education from the normative, descriptive and analytic perspectives offer critical means of inquiry into educational realities for researchers. Writing within these frameworks is doing philosophy. Doing philosophy is doing research. The descriptive perspective works out of systems of philosophical thought, schools of thought, offering foundational positions from which to work; the normative perspective offers a "process of inquiry into ideas and basic beliefs that will enable us to form reasoned attitudes about the important issues of our time" (Wingo, 1974, p.22). The analytic perspective allows us to inquire into the use of language, the meaning, and clarification of language used to talk about education. This is philosophical inquiry. This is doing philosophy.

Those of us involved in education know that it is a very complex social undertaking. It has many important dimensions that can be examined from psychological, sociological, political perspectives, yet there is one question that is uniquely philosophical: "the question of determining the ends of education" (Wingo, 1974, p.22). The means and ends of education are inseparably united. Wingo (1974) quotes Max Black:

All serious discussion of educational problems, no matter how specific, soon leads to consideration of educational aims, and becomes a conversation about the good life, the nature of man, the varieties of experience. But these are the perennial themes of philosophical investigation.

It might be a hard thing to expect educators to be philosophical, but can they be anything else? (p.22) Conceptualizations about "the good life", the nature of humankind, etc., are problematic because there are no final, all inclusive positions on these concepts. Inquiry into these issues can take place through the descriptive, normative, and analytic perspectives. And each of these perspectives will demand different questions be posed. This process is doing philosophy, doing philosophical inquiry.

To understand how the three perspectives can be used in the study of education, Wingo (1974) suggests that there are three assumptions that underlie the nature of philosophical inquiry in education. These three assumptions are critical to an understanding of the importance, scope, and possibility the study of philosophy has for the study of education. As obvious as it may seem, the first assumption is: "The primary subject matter of philosophy of education is education itself" (p.24). Thus the phenomena of education, in all its myriad forms, are the "subject matter" for study. From a research point of view this can mean looking at curricula, the outcomes of learning, testing, organizational matters, place of schools within the social setting, the means-ends of education, etc., etc.

The second, and perhaps the most insightful and critical assumption, states that "Education always takes place within a certain constellation of cultural conditions and therefore it cannot be studied as a set of universal and independent phenomena" (p.24). This assumption means that there is no "one best system" to model schools after and no single answer to complex educational situations. This assumption suggests that we need to view education relationally, in

context (cf Apple, 1979; Beyer, 1986; Purpel, 1993), and clearly identifies the complex nature of understanding education. At the same time this assumption suggests the myriad possibilities for inquiry into the process of schooling. By this I mean that the nature of the inquiry is dependent upon the researcher. It is not standardized, it is not given (cf. Eisner, 1991).

The third assumption underlying the nature of philosophical inquiry in education states that the "basic purpose of philosophy of education applies to the ends and means of education and their interrelationships" (Wingo, 1974, p.24). The assumption suggests the complexity of educational experience and the many variables/ factors that influence the process. These assumptions clearly call for the descriptive, normative, and analytic perspectives of viewing educational realities, but also point toward the need for expanding our decision to accomodate other perspectives such as interpretive and critical forms of inquiry, as well as the empirical.

A way to expand my discussion to accomodate other perspectives that can be used in looking at the relationship between philosophy, inquiry and education can be found in examining research paradigms. This framework (research paradigms) extends the more traditional descriptive, normative and analytic perspectives by looking at methodological/ epistemological viewpoints. This framework allows the researcher to identify human interests within modes of inquiry.

Bredo and Feinberg (1982) discuss differing paradigms according to the research methodologies utilized. These methodologies have inherent interests in the kind of research findings sought and generated. The paradigms identified are the empirical, or positivistic, the interpretive, and the critical approaches to social and educational research. These paradigms have fundamental differences that separate the positivistic from the interpretive and critical approaches. These differences are of a philosophical nature concerning the nature of reality (metaphysics), subject-object dualism, generalization, causality, and axiology (Koetting, 1985; 1993), and how we come to know reality in any way whatsoever (epistemology). These concerns keep us rooted in doing philosophy.

## FOUNDATIONS AND THEORY

Although I have used the term "foundations" frequently in this section, I am not talking about the establishment of a "meta-narrative" (Lyotard, 1984; Hlynka and Yeaman, 1992). I am not talking about "doing philosophy in the grand manner" of building systems of thought (Wingo, 1974). I do not believe that there is only one complete explanation or understanding of our social world and that given the time and effort we will be able to "figure things out". What I am saying about foundations is the way in which philosophy is carried out, within philosophical inquiry, the problem-posing, the questioning, the search for clarification, the quest for seeing things relationally, provides multiple ways of inquiring into the world of social and educational realities.

Martusewicz and Reynolds (1994) state a similar position regarding foundations. They see the purpose of foundations to raise questions and offer points of view that ask us to see what we do as teachers or as students in new or at least unfamiliar ways, from another side, perhaps from the inside, of perhaps from both inside and outside. It is an invitation to look at education both socially and historically as well as practically, that is, from the inside (the complex processes, methods, and relations that affect individuals in schools, for example) within the context of the outside (the larger social, economic, and political forces that have affected those processes over time). (p.2)

This notion of inside/outside (school/world) provides a sociocultural perspective that suggests the "flux of boundaries", and allows the researcher/participant to see the relationships of seemingly separate realities, as well as questions the idea of foundations as a "stable set of knowledges, concepts, or principles to be discovered, defined, and then presented in a unilinear way" (Martusewicz and Reynolds, 1994, p.3; also see Greene, 1974). Again, there is no one best way to explain what happens in the world or in education. Possibilities for understanding, however, can take place when we pay "particular attention to perspectives that maintain a critical stance, a willingness to put existing assumptions and interpretations into question" (Martusewicz and Reynolds, 1994, p.3).

As I become engaged in this form of critical inquiry, I become involved in theory (foundations). There are multiple theoretical perspectives on the world, knowledge, value. However, there is no meta-narrative. There is no grand philosophy (Greene, 1974; 1994; and Martusewicz & Reynolds, 1994). Returning to an assumption made earlier from Wingo (1974),

Education always takes place within a certain constellation of cultural conditions and therefore it cannot be studied as a set of universal and independent phenomena. Some set of relations among education, politics, and social institutions is inevitable and cannot be ignored in any useful analysis (p.24). There are multiple explanations/understandings of schooling, of the "world", and multiple ways of knowing. Multiple ways of understanding the world of education have to do with theory. Understanding the notion of theory can provide insight into the multiple interpretations of the world and experience. Theorizing is a mode of philosophical inquiry that suggests the complexities and possibilities for creating/constructing knowledge. And that is the subject of another series of papers.[3]

## ENDNOTES

1. Part of this paper comes from my extended essay "Philosophy, education and research", which appears in David H. Jonassen (In press). Handbook of research on educational communications and technology. NY: Scholastic.

2. See Anderson (1990) for a discussion of educational research and the place of philosophy within educational research.

3. See Hlynka and Belland, 1991; Koetting and Januszewski, 1991; Yeaman, Andersen, Damarin, and Muffoletto, in press; and Nichols and Allen-Brown, in press.

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